

INVOICE SOLUTION

# StEB



**Challenge:**

- » Swift replacement of the existing workflow solution for the processing of vendor invoices

**Solution:**

- » Extended range of functions for municipal supply and disposal requirements
- » Transfer of existing IT resources: scanner, OCR extraction, archive
- » Special workflow in case of flood

**Benefits:**

- » The process costs per invoice were significantly reduced
- » Full transparency
- » Reduced complexity and targeted fulfillment of tasks



# AFI Invoice for a controlled Document Flow

Comprehensively supported and with multiple security, invoicing procedures now flow through the verification and approval processes of Stadtentwässerungsbetriebe Köln (StEB), Cologne's urban drainage services, with the assistance of AFI Invoice, a tool for the electronic processing of incoming invoices provided by AFI Solutions GmbH.

As a result, StEB is efficiently equipped for the 50,000 vendor invoices per year and can concentrate on core tasks consisting of sustainable management of all challenges related to the protection of the most vital good: excellent water for the Cologne urban area.

## Water Management

Cologne, Germany's fourth largest city situated on the great »Father Rhine«, faces special challenges in urban drainage. One million citizens depend on StEB's services. Fulfilling these tasks is anything but easy:

Cologne, a city that is over 2,000 years old, has Roman sewerage roots as well as a sewer network which partly dates back to the 19th century and needs to be systematically renovated.

In addition, the provisions of the EU Water Framework Directive, which aims at the ecological sustainability of water use, are to be fulfilled.

Around 650 staff members at StEB's water-management competence center are responsible for this.

## From the specific Solution...

StEB used a powerful archive system in conjunction with the central SAP ERP system. In this way, all business transactions can be processed in a standardized manner and securely archived at the same time.

All IT solutions in use are centrally managed in the data center of the City of Cologne. A core element in the optimization of business transactions is the processing of incoming invoices which efficiently controls and significantly accelerates the electronic circulation of vendor invoices, thus making internal forwarding of transactions on unwieldy paper obsolete.

This is also confirmed by Oliver Saus, technical project manager for commercial document processes at StEB:

*“Efficient and transparent processing of incoming invoices significantly reduces our process costs per invoice.”*

### ...to the adaptable Standard Solution

The individual solution initially introduced was specifically adapted to StEB's requirements. However, in the course of an SAP release change, the maintenance of the changed programming turned out to be costly and not very sustainable. Therefore, the implementation of a standard solution was considered.

For this purpose, the market was explored and - after careful consideration - the solution AFI Invoice provided by AFI Solutions was chosen because it could be seamlessly integrated into StEB's existing system landscape. Changes to the archive system, scanners, OCR extraction or the SAP ERP system were not necessary.

### Little Adaptation required

In addition to the low adaption effort, the functional depth played an important part: up to now, the existing workflow solution has had a large share in

the efficiency of StEB's accounting. Under no circumstances should the extra hours, which were previously saved, or the shortened phases needed for the annual financial statement again be a problem in the processing and release of around 150 invoices per day. Jürgen Becker, Deputy Chairman of StEB, boils it down to an essence:

*“User-friendly digital invoice processing is an integral part for employee approval when it comes to using electronic tools. It supports the implementation of my vision of an end-to-end digital process at Stadtentwässerungsbetriebe Köln.”*

The wide integration depth of AFI's SAP components seemed to be eminently suitable for this purpose. StEB's invoice documents include a large share of construction invoices after all.

Due to their specific characteristics, such as a high number of pages and frequent deviations from the actual posting, these are not easy to process electronically. In addition, the solution could also be made future-proof independent of further SAP release changes. A time frame of six months was estimated for the transition.

### More Components, more Functions

Not only were the existing processes mapped in the new solution during this period but they were also extended with additional components and functions. Oliver Saus describes the course of the project as follows: *“Clear distribution of tasks and responsibilities as well as the high professionalism of AFI Solutions contributed to the success of the project day after day.”*

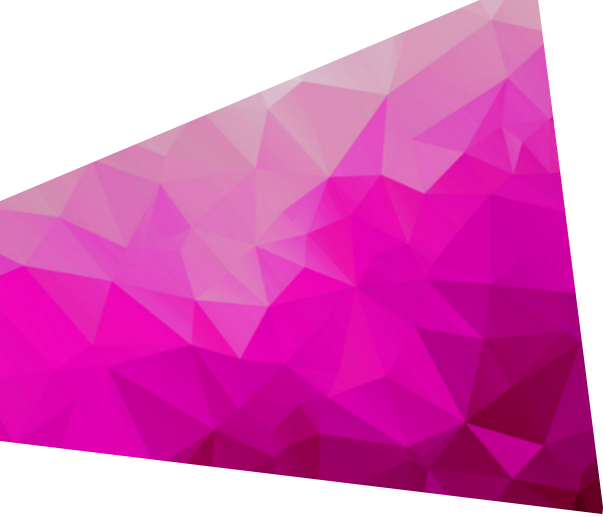
550 non-SAP users can now also participate in the invoice approval process via a web portal. They can enjoy a high range of functions which are quite similar to the ones of the users in the native SAP GUI, but with reduced complexity for targeted task fulfillment.

The SAP GUI users in the process are mainly active in accounting for FI documents and in purchasing for MM documents. With AFI Invoice, these are now provided with significantly enhanced convenience: due to the fully integrated letter writing component Supplier-COM, which is based on SAP script technology with letter templates, suppliers can be notified of any objections, that may arise with regard to invoices, directly from SAP with little effort.

The generated cover letter, which can be sent by letter, fax or e-mail including an optional invoice image in the attachment, is archived directly in the process of course. This ensures complete traceability.

Especially for construction invoices, StEB also checks if valid certificates of exemption are available for the vendor. Simone Lubberich, Head of external Accounting at StEB comments on the overall concept:

*„Electronic invoicing handles the workflows automatically so that the staff members can devote themselves to their actual professional competence in the context of accounting. Annoying and time-consuming routine tasks are taken over by the software but high quality work is done by my staff. That is what I expect from useful IT solutions.”*



## **A**dditional Security

There is an additional security level even after invoice release before payment: for this purpose, the SAP transaction F110 was developed for automatic payment transactions with jumps to the respective underlying invoice image to allow for a final visual check.

## **L**arge Flood Protection Center

AFI Solutions implemented a special requirement of StEB for times of flood: from stage IV (> 7.50 m to > 9.50 m Cologne gage), the »large flood protection center« is installed. This involves measures which will result in a high number of invoices. In order to be prepared for this in invoice processing, new workflows were jointly developed.

By temporarily employing special and higher-priority document types, the »invoice floods« can be processed even more specifically and systematically. In case of major catastrophic events, for example, payments to affected parties and third-party responders can now be released as quickly as possible. According to Loni Matheis, main user in StEB's accounting department, *"you do not lose track even in such extreme situations."*

## **E**verything is in flow

Future prospects are promising: compliance with the EU Water Framework Directive EU is making good progress – among other things by involving the general public with the assistance of the popular »Hänneschen«, a character from the famous Cologne puppet theater. The decision for the software solution of AFI Solutions also proves to be right.

*"Constant product enhancements driven by a friendly ear for the customer particularly distinguish AFI Solutions,"* Mr Saus emphasizes again.

Stadtentwässerungsbetriebe Köln (StEB), a public-law institution, is a modern and innovative municipal company for water management which is completely owned by the City of Cologne. The main tasks are wastewater disposal, flood protection and prevention as well as the maintenance of water bodies and expansion. A further area of activity is road drainage.

All tasks are carried out in an environmentally friendly and economical manner at a high level of quality with the goal of sustainability in line with the requirements of the Water Management Act as well as the State Water Act of North-Rhine Westphalia.

[www.steb-koeln.de](http://www.steb-koeln.de)

AFI is a solution provider and leading manufacturer of software for the optimization of paperless, digital document processes around SAP as well as a provider of services for document capture and processing. AFI offers optimal solutions for the entire purchase-to-pay and order-to-cash process.

AFI combines state-of-the-art SAP technology with technical innovation to develop excellent software solutions integrated in SAP for processing a wide range of document types. Routine tasks are replaced by automated and paperless processes.

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